

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KALAMAZOO COURTS TO PLAN FOR STREAMLINED OPERATIONS; IMPROVED PUBLIC SERVICE IS GOAL

KALAMAZOO, MI, September 26, 2003 -- Kalamazoo circuit, district, and probate courts will begin planning soon to combine some of their operations, the State Court Administrative Office announced today.

Public Act 678 of 2002, which became effective in April 2003, permits local courts to have a “plan of concurrent jurisdiction” which consolidates some or all trial court operations. Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan has said that the statute gives Michigan communities a choice in court reform.

Currently, most Michigan counties have separate circuit, probate, and district courts. Seven “demonstration project” courts – Barry County, Berrien County, Iron County, Isabella County, Lake County, Washtenaw County, and 46th Circuit (Otsego, Crawford, and Kalkaska counties) – consolidated circuit, probate, and district courts into a single trial court. All the judges of the consolidated trial courts may be assigned to any division of the court – family, criminal, civil, etc. – to meet the demands of the court’s workload. A 2001 study by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) concluded that the demonstration project courts “are generally making more efficient use of judicial and quasi-judicial resources ... than the pre-consolidation courts.” In addition, the demonstration project courts used technology effectively, reduced the amount of time to resolve cases, and “hastened the delivery of justice to families,” the NCSC report stated.

The form that the Kalamazoo court streamlining project will take “remains to be seen,” said State Court Regional Administrator James P. Hughes. “The statute permits courts to consolidate on a ‘local option’ basis. In the same spirit, courts that choose this option adopt their own plans – subject to approval by the Supreme Court – so that they can address their own local issues and improve public service.”

In January, the Supreme Court issued Administrative Order 2003-1, which provides that “[s]ubject to approval by the Supreme Court, a plan of concurrent jurisdiction may be adopted by a majority vote of judges of the participating trial courts.” Plans must address judicial, financial and administrative issues, and must be approved by the Michigan Supreme Court.

The State Court Administrative Office will provide a facilitator and project management services for the planning effort, which will kick off this fall with a judicial summit in early November. State Court Administrator John D. Ferry, Jr. said that the project comes “at an opportune time for the courts in Kalamazoo, following up earlier court improvement efforts in technology, jury services, and public information.”

Judges and staff will review a variety of functional areas for concurrent jurisdiction over the next several months, including court governance, administrative structure, judicial resources, human resources, facilities and infrastructure, budget and fiscal management, information systems, jury management, records management, training, and external relations.

“I believe the Kalamazoo judicial leadership has established a strong foundation for improved service with this initiative,” said Hughes. “We are pleased to provide support for local judges interested in improving the administration of justice.”

More information on streamlined courts is available at <http://www.courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/Press/Reorganization.htm>.

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